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ABSTRACT

The impact of divorce on children seems to vary according to the child's age. Previous studies on the impact of divorce on children have generally focused on pre-schoolers and elementary-age children. Since more long-term marriages are ending in divorce, attention should also be given to adolescent and adult children of divorce. Subjects (N=26) who were 11 years old or older at the time of their parents' divorce responded to an instrument assessing their feelings at the time of the divorce and their feelings at the time they completed the questionnaire. Parents completed similar questionnaires for children (N=9) who were younger than 11 at the time of divorce. Parents' responses for the younger group of children indicated that the younger children were, in general, less troubled than the older ones at the time of the separation or divorce. The older children, in contrast, tended to show a wide range of responses and were more sensitive to their feelings at the time of separation as well as in the present. They reported feeling angrier and more depressed than the younger children at the time of divorce and also reported feeling unhappier than the younger children both at the time of divorce and at present. The older children, who were generally more variable in their self-ratings than the parents were in rating the younger children, also showed a larger mean score for total change than did the younger children. (DPO)

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Effects of Divorce on Children of Different Ages:

A Descriptive Study

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Effects of Divorce on Children: A Descriptive Study

Abstract

Comparisons among age groups (pre-school through young adult) and among studies completed in recent decades demonstrate variations in family structure and social attitudes in a changing world. The principal impact of divorce on children, as seen in this context, reveals that the effects vary not only by age but by era. Particular attention is paid in this research to adolescent and young adult children of divorce.

EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY*

Comparisons among age groups (pre-school through young adult) and among studies completed in the last four decades demonstrate variations in family structure and social attitudes toward divorce in an ever-changing world. Research studies on the effects of divorce on children have generally been focused on pre-school and latency-age children. As more long-term marriages (20 years and longer) culminate in divorce, however, attention should also be centered on adolescent and adult children of divorce.

Review of the Literature

Changes in divorce rates

Government data indicate that the divorce rate per 1000 population, as of 1982, has increased almost seventeen-fold since 1867 when divorce data first became available. In 1867, the rate per 1000 population was 0.3; in 1982, it was 5.0 per 1000. The rate of acceleration increased sharply beginning in 1968 (2.9/1000) after fluctuating between 2.1 and 2.6 in the period 1950-1967 (NCHS, 1985).

Similarly, the number of children involved in divorces and living with a single divorced parent has increased in the years since 1950 from 6.3/1000 children under 18 years of age to 18.7/1000 (or 1 in 53 children) in 1981 and to 17.6/1000 in 1982. Smaller families have meant fewer children involved per divorcing couple, with data cited by the Public Health Service showing that "45 percent of divorces involved no children, 26 percent involved one child, 20 percent involved two children, and 9 percent involved three children or more" (NCHS, 1984, p. 2). Apparently no similar records exist

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to indicate how many divorces involved adult children, although 11 percent of divorces in both 1981 and 1982 terminated marriages of 20 years' duration and more.

The changes in divorce rates since the 1960's, and even more since the 1930's, reflect a number of factors. Economically, the nation was considerably more affluent in the post-World War II period than during the Depression, and even during the recession-recovery cycles of the past 20 years, permitting those who wished to separate to have the "luxury" of maintaining two households. Occupationally, the civil rights movement led to affirmative action in employment, with more women in better-paying jobs (despite continuing wage differentials) and thus making more independence possible for them. Legally, fewer judges were awarding lifetime alimony to wives, which reduced financial obligations for the ex-husband somewhat. Physically, longer life expectancy has made people conscious of the possibility that they may be united with the same person for more than fifty years. In earlier centuries, many women died in childbirth and many men died from illness or occupational accidents, resulting in a sequence of spouses and therefore some variety. The "me-first" attitude of the 1970's, though, led many people to ask themselves "Is this all there is?" as they looked at themselves and their marriages after 15-20 years and contemplated the next 30-40 years with the same partner. The answer to this question led to many separations as one spouse or the other sought to "find" himself or herself. Staying together "for the sake of the children" no longer seemed to be seen as necessary or appropriate.

Changes in Attitudes toward Divorce

In general, public views of divorce earlier in this century tended to

be negative, frequently on religious grounds. As recently as 1956, Goode mentioned "the fairly general disapproval of divorce, particularly when children are involved" (1960, p. 317). The multiple divorces of film stars and of some very wealthy individuals were the basis for gossip column items and newspaper headlines. Divorce was seen as a liability for political figures, although both Adlai E. Stevenson in mid-century and Nelson Rockefeller in the 1960's-1970's achieved election to governorships and roles on the national political scene.

Duvall (1971) cited the factors found in decades of research that contributed to vulnerability of marriages to divorce. Some of those factors, examined more than a decade later, appear to reflect middle-class bias: more divorces at lower socio-economic strata, among the less educated, among unskilled workers, in interfaith marriages, in childless marriages, and among "irresponsible" persons (p. 509). Divorces today, especially as the desire for "self-actualization" has grown, are increasingly common among middle- and upper-middle-class, well-educated, managerial and professional couples who have been typically more receptive to the appeal for individuation than blue collar couples.

State legislatures (except in South Dakota) have recognized public shifts in attitude toward divorce by enacting "no-fault" divorce laws. This has made divorce more palatable in the eyes of some spouses who might otherwise have hesitated to label their marital partner "adulterer" or "abuser." It has not, however, necessarily diminished the pain of separation and divorce for the rejected spouse nor eased the financial and other problems that often accompany divorce. One such problem for those with minor children is which parent

will have custody, or whether the parents will attempt co-parenting or some other variation of joint custody. The outcome of attempts to resolve this question has significant effects on the children of divorce.

Effects of divorce on children

Children may be separated from a parent by illness, war, death, and divorce. In the case of the first two, there may be anxiety about the parent's well-being, but there is a measure of confidence that the parent will return safely home. In the case of death, there is a time set aside for mourning rituals that help the child accept the loss. There is no traditional mourning period for the child of divorce, however, which makes coping with this parental loss that much more disturbing and difficult (Laiken, 1981). When one parent leaves the other, the child is confronted with the fear that he or she will also be abandoned as unworthy and undesirable. Over the years, from the time of separation and well into the post-divorce period, relationships with the parted parents change, as do the children's images of the parents and of themselves.

Just as the couple must go through stages of divorce (Bohannon, 1973; Kaslow, 1979-80), so must the children, according to Wallerstein (1983). She itemized six psychological tasks, the first two of which need immediate attention and resolution within one year, while the next three may need to be reworked several times. Task I is the acknowledgement of the reality of the marital separation, which may involve fears of abandonment and/or ego regression. Task II is to disengage from the parental conflict so that customary pursuits can be resumed. Inability to disengage is reflected in

lower learning achievement, higher drop-out rates, and some acting-out behavior. The third task has to do with "resolution of loss"--the loss of family traditions, the loss of one parent, feelings of rejection and unlovability. Task IV, resolving anger and self-blame, confronts children's lack of belief in the concept of no-fault divorce. According to Wallerstein, "Divorce characteristically gives rise to anger at the one parent who sought the divorce or both parents for their perceived self-centeredness or unresponsiveness to the wishes of the child to maintain the intact family" (1983, p. 239). She found the anger to be especially intense and long-lasting among the older children of divorce. The fifth task is to accept the permanence of the divorce, although its irreversibility may be difficult for younger children, particularly, to accept. The final task, according to Wallerstein, is to achieve realistic hope regarding one's own future relationships. She concludes that young adults may fear love relationships as a result of recurrence of the residues of sadness, anger, and anxiety at critical times during their adult years.

The effects of the divorce, both short- and long-term, have been studied by many researchers (Coddington, 1972; Emery, 1982; Fine, Moreland, & Schwebel, 1983; Goode, 1956; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1979; Kalter & Rembar, 1981; Kelly & Berg, 1978; Kinard & Reinherz, 1984; Lamb, 1977; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Wynn & Brumberger, 1982). Contrary to the view held twenty and more years ago, there is now some support for the idea that the negative consequences of coming from a broken home may be minimal and/or potentially modifiable (Kulka & Weingarten, 1979). Indeed, it has been suggested that continuing childhood problems may derive more from pre-separation interparental

conflict than from the divorce itself (Emery, 1982). Kinard and Reinherz (1984) found that "the type, severity, and persistence of problems manifested by children experiencing marital disruption may be mediated by a number of demographic and situational factors" (p. 91). The factors include: sex and age of the child; characteristics of the family--size, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, maternal employment; and situation--reason for the disruption, length of time since the split, conflict in the family before and after separation, child's relationship with the non-custodial parent, and social support systems available for the single parent. In a review of the literature, Jacobs (1982) wrote that the negative effects of divorce on children tend to be found where their families "contained a distant, uninvolved, unsupportive, or angry non-custodial father and/or a chronically embittered, angry, vengeful custodial mother" (p. 1235). Children's stress appears to be positively correlated with parental stress and negative exspousal contacts, and inversely related to the length of time since the separation/divorce occurred (Woody, et al., 1984).

In a survey of 400 psychiatrists, Pietropinto (1985) reported that they believe the children in unhappy marriages may be victimized by their parents' conflicts. Forty-seven percent felt that physical abuse of children is much more common in such families; 52% that the child matures later emotionally in such families; 46% that parental quarreling leads to excessively aggressive children; and 34% that anxiety, and 23% that depression, is the most common adverse effect on children. Where such children cannot be spared the parents' angry confrontations, they may be, as several of our own subjects indicated, better off if the parents separate. Little (1982) has pointed

out, however, that if the child is spared from the conflicts, the child-parent relationship suffers less disruption, and if "a child is able to retain a warm relationship with at least one parent, he or she suffers fewer negative consequences during the period of separation and divorce" (p. 161).

Child Custody

Luepnitz (1982) asked, in her research, "What are the advantages and disadvantages of maternal, paternal, and joint custody (a) from the adults' point of view and (b) from the children's point of view?" (p. 14). Historically, there have been biases toward paternal custody (child seen as property), and maternal custody ("tender years" doctrine), with little concern for either advantages or disadvantages. Current statutory and judicial biases are in the direction of some form of joint custody, although several researchers have asserted that "there is little basis for adopting as public policy the assumption that cooperation rather than conflict will ensue" from such a policy (Derdeyn & Scott, 1984). Despite what a judge may decide, the relationship between the parents and between parents and child(ren) may take a form other than harmonious joint custody. Westman (1983) suggests four patterns: 1) parent-centered, with litigation continuing after the divorce; 2) child-centered, in which the children manipulate their parents so that the parental relationship persists at an intense level; 3) one parent-one child allied against the other parent; and 4) relative-influenced, in which in-laws "meddle" and grandparents carry on the marital "war." Glick (1979) estimated that by 1990, only 71% of children under age 18 will be living with two

parents, 25% will be living with one parent (16% with mother only and 2% with father only), and the remainder will be living with other relatives, foster parents, or friends (p. 171). Custody arrangements, and the way in which they are created, do have an impact on many children of divorce. For example, Springer and Wallerstein (1983) found that young adolescents resented not being included in planning visitation schedules. Such resentment affects not only relations with the parents, but attitudes and behaviors in other sectors of the young person's life as well.

In addition to the emotional effects of divorce on children, as part of single-parent families, they are also likely to be at risk for poverty, anxiety about support for higher education, and legal problems (Jenkins, 1978). The ramifications of divorce appear, however, to be differential by gender and age, as a wide variety of studies have indicated.

Gender Differences

In several studies it has been found that boys tend to react more poorly to divorce, both in intensity and in duration, than girls (Emery, 1982; Hodges & Bloom, 1984; Kurdek & Berg, 1983). However, Reinhard (1977), Pett (1982), and Kinard and Reinherz (1984) found no gender differences in their subjects' post-divorce reactions, and Farber, Primavera, and Felner (1983) found that female adolescents suffered greater stress than male adolescents. Differences in sampling, questions asked, locus of control, and custody arrangements among the respondents in the several studies are some of the factors that may account for these conflicting results. Hammond (1981) found no significant differences in self-concept, reading achievement, or

mathematics achievement between children of intact families and those from divorced families among third to sixth-graders. However, teachers rated the boys from divorced families higher on "acting-out" and "distractibility" than boys from intact families, but saw no significant differences in girls. Hammond also found that the girls were more likely to see positive potential in the divorce for themselves, while this was not so for the boys. As far as perceptions of behavior go, "Girls are likely to be just as troubled by marital turmoil as boys are, but they may demonstrate their feelings in a manner that is more appropriate to their sex role, namely, by being anxious, withdrawn, or perhaps very well behaved" (Emery, 1982, p. 317). A nationwide study of children in first, third, and fifth grades found poorer adjustment among the boys and older children (Guidubaldi, et al., 1983). Less evidence of gender differences is available, however, for children of divorce at later ages.

Age Differences

Most of the research on impact of divorce on children has been focused, as noted earlier, on pre-schoolers and elementary school children, while relatively few studies have dealt with those who were adolescents or young adults at the time of parental separation. The ways in which the same negative effects are expressed, however, have been shown to differ by age. For example, the pre-schooler may demonstrate his anxiety and distress by regression, the latency-age child by aggression or withdrawal, the adolescent by sexual rebellion or anger, and the young adult by depression or rebellion. Younger children tend to blame themselves for the divorce; adolescents and

young adults tend to disapprove of the behavior of one or both parents (Wallerstein, 1983). If the parent goes out on dates, the younger children are likely to feel threatened by the parent's absence, while the older ones look askance at the sexuality of their parents that is implied in such activity. (Remarriage similarly affects children differently depending in part on their age at that point.)

In a study of pre-Oedipal, Oedipal, and post-Oedipal children, at the time of parental separation, Kalter and Rembar (1981) found negative correlations between age at the time of divorce and level of emotional disturbance for all of their sample (N = 144 outpatient children) and for the adolescent boys in the sample. They also found that while adolescent girls tended to have drug or alcohol involvement, or to exhibit running away/truancy/sexual acting-out behavior, latency girls did not. On the other hand, parental separation during the child's latency or Oedipal years, was significantly correlated with a higher frequency of academic problems (p. 94).

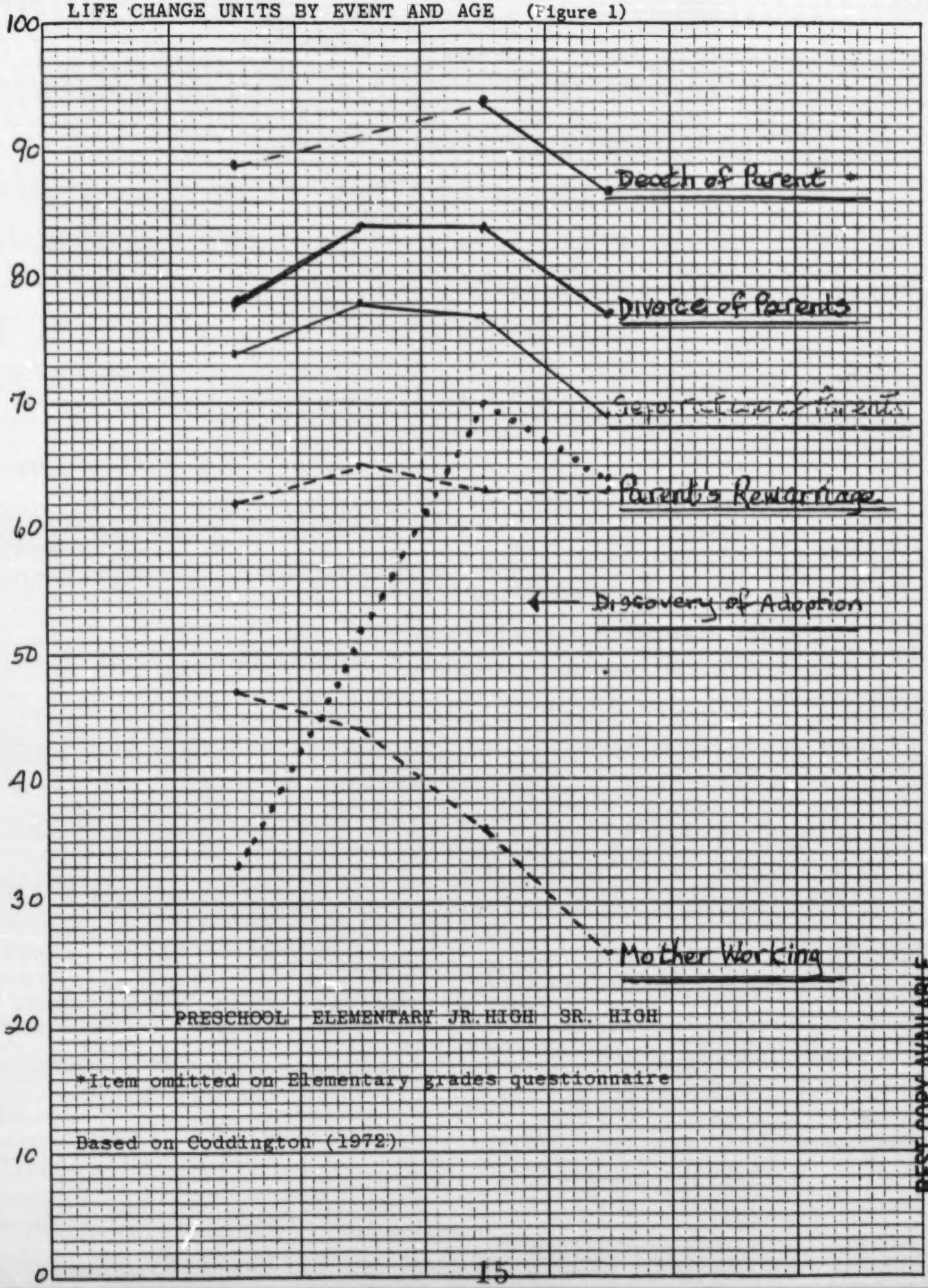
Kelly and Berg (1978) studied 488 children, aged 9 to 15 years, using a Family Story Test. The test differentiated among children of divorce, those in unhappy but intact families, and those in happy intact families. The children expressed several themes: feelings of self-blame leading to feelings of guilt, fear of abandonment, hopes for reunification of the parents, feelings of being "in the middle" between parents who degraded each other, and feelings of ridicule from other children. As Goode put it, "Children of divorcees are aware of their own status ambiguity and usually desire to 'be like other children'" (1960, p. 323). Today the child of divorce is no longer in the minority at school; to the contrary, in many neighborhoods, it

is the child living in an intact family who is the exception. Under these circumstances, ridicule by other children is less likely to occur.

In Hammond's study of children in grades 3 to 6, both positive and negative perceptions of divorce were obtained from children in divorced (N=82) and intact (N=83) lower-middle class families. On the positive side, the children said that their parents wouldn't be fighting so much, that they would receive more presents from their parents, that they could celebrate holidays twice, that they would have more attention from their parents, and that they would enjoy visiting the non-custodial parent. On the negative side, the children saw less money for the family and the disadvantage of not seeing one parent as much any more (1981, p. 78). On the issue of holidays in particular, however, the joy of double celebrations for young children is seen as a burden by adolescents (Hagestad, et al., 1984).

In a study by Coddington (1972), based on the Holmes and Rahe (1967) study of the effects of life change events on health, more than 3500 children from pre-school through senior high school ranked changes in their family situation. As can be seen in Figure 1 below, divorce of parents was second only to death of a parent in magnitude of change. What is particularly significant in the data collected by Coddington, however, is that the perception of stress increases from pre-school to elementary school age, remains high into early adolescence, and then declines in the senior high school years. This is consistent with developmental changes in children. The latency age child is more aware of family identity and traditions than the younger child, and the middle adolescent is beginning to separate from the family as he/she integrates his or her identity and associates more with peers than with family members. This pattern is confirmed in Wallerstein's

LIFE CHANGE UNITS BY EVENT AND AGE (Figure 1)



*Item omitted on Elementary grades questionnaire

Based on Coddington (1972)

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ten-year follow-up study of children who were aged 2 1/2 - 6 years when their parents divorced. She found that "those who were youngest at the time of the marital breakup fared better in the ensuing years than their older siblings, who experienced more difficulty in dealing with troubled memories of family strife" (1984, p. 444).

Adolescence is generally perceived as a difficult developmental period both by those living through it and by those who live with them. If parents divorce at this stage of a child's development, what impact on them does the divorce have? The Coddington study suggests that the impact is less than it might be if they were younger. Schwartzberg (1980), on the other hand, detected three types of reactions among those adolescent children of divorce who became patients: 1) those whose prior symptoms became worse, 2) those who regressed temporarily, and 3) those who made premature attempts at maturity (sexual acting-out, drug abuse, runaways). The adolescents who coped best with the crisis were those "who demonstrated prior good ego strength, good relationships with the custodial parent, and minimal parent regression" (p. 389). The relationship between custodial parent's emotional state and the child's reaction is obviously as important for the older children of divorce as it is for the younger ones. As Westman (1983) pointed out, the world is not an easy place for today's adolescents. They "must contend with a social climate in which the survival of the earth is in jeopardy, marriage is portrayed romantically as a means of receiving rather than giving, and anxiety is handled by escape" (p. 694). Thus there is even more reason for a mutually supportive relationship.

McLoughlin and Whitfield (1984), in a study of 64 Australian children

aged 13-17 years at the time of separation, found that half of their group saw the divorce as a "relief" because of pre-separation conflicts (verbal and/or physical) between their parents during several months of the pre-separation period. Twelve percent of the Australian youths saw a deterioration in their school performance as a result of the separation stress, but fifty percent saw an improvement at the time of separation. McLoughlin and Whitfield added that few of their subjects "felt that their relationship with their teachers had deteriorated or that they were less self-confident" (p. 160).

On the question of peer relationships, the majority of the Australian adolescents said that they did not experience any difference in peer relationships as a result of being part of a one-parent family. Eighty-four percent of these subjects planned to marry and expected to have a happy marriage. In concluding their study, McLoughlin and Whitfield wrote that parents should keep their children informed of their intentions regarding the marital relationship both during the pre-separation and post-separation periods. "They also need to avoid denigrating their partner to their children and ensure that they are able to continue their relationship with both parents if they wish to do so. Discretion and sensitivity about entering into new relationships and a parent's conduct in those relationships would also seem to be important to adolescents" (1984, p. 170). Since adolescents are typically very much involved with their own emerging sexuality, they tend to be exquisitely sensitive to their parents' sexuality and often are embarrassed by it. According to another study, parental divorce tends to be related to an increase in courtship activities among children,

especially if the custodial parent remains single and is dating (Booth, Brinkerhoff, & White, 1984).

As compared with studies of children of divorce focused on pre-school and latency studies, there are very few centered on late adolescents and young adults, particularly college students. Hillard (1984) points out that parents of college students may have remained in an unhappy marriage "for the sake of the children" and separate as the youngest goes off to college or a career. Although there may be a negative impact on these young people, whether youngest or not, the total effect of the parental separation tends not to be as earth-shaking as it is for younger children. College students are geographically removed from the situation, involved in their own academic and social activities, and not subject, as the younger children are, to having to choose (or have chosen for them) one parent or the other as legal "custodian."

> "College students may react differently to the experience of parental divorce than do younger individuals, both because of their developmental level and because of living in the college environment. Developmentally, the college student is likely to have a relatively mature ego, with the capacity to use relatively higher order defense mechanisms, such as suppression, sublimation, and altruism in dealing with feelings related to divorce. At the same time, however, the developmental tasks of college students, such as consolidation of an independent identity and development of intimacy, may be particularly

vulnerable to disruption by stresses of parental divorce" (Hillard, 1984, p. 665).

For some college students, of course, the separation may come as a relief from parental bickering, or worse, in earlier years. They may even express distress at the pain one or both parents is suffering, but recognize that they are better off apart. In contrast to these relatively mature perceptions, counseling directors found that college students from separated or divorced families, as compared with those from intact families, tended to have greater difficulties in affective adjustment, to have more behavior problems, and to have greater problems in interpersonal relationships (Farber, Primavera, & Felner, 1983). Specific problems cited include depression, anxiety, feelings of abandonment and insecurity, increased drug and alcohol usage, sleeping and eating disturbances, inability to concentrate on studies, peer problems, sexual identity problems, loyalty dilemmas, and financial stress. It should be noted that these directors of college counseling services, as well as Hillard (1984), drew their conclusions from an essentially clinical population, i.e., those students who had sought psychological or psychiatric assistance at this critical time in their lives.

In general, the adult children of divorce have found support networks among their friends, dating partners, and siblings. As with younger children in recent years, they are no longer so "different" from their peers as was true a generation ago. In the study of college counseling directors, 73% of that sample agreed that this is a difficult transition period for college students and 76% felt that counseling would be profitable for students confronted with a parental divorce, but "only 7.2% of the Directors mentioned

the availability of any specific support services to students in the midst of this life transition at their education institution" (Farber, et al., 1983, p. 70).

In the study by Booth, et al. (1984) mentioned earlier, students who were children of divorce, as compared with those from intact families and those who had lost a parent by death, were found to be more likely to engage in premarital sexual intercourse and to be living with a sexual partner. The researchers hypothesized that these students may be modeling their behavior on that of their parents. At the same time, these students reported less satisfaction with heterosexual relationships. Age at the time of the parental separation or divorce had no effect on the level or the evaluation of courtship activity, and females were found to be more likely to cohabit if there was postdivorce conflict or a deterioration in parent-child relationships. Seeking affection under stress, modeling one's behavior on a parent's behavior (especially if that parent remains single), and premarital sexual relations are not, however, particularly abnormal phenomena in today's society.

Some older children of divorce have reported recurrent themes of "increased vulnerability and stress, conflicting loyalties to parents, anger and worries about parents and their future" (Bales, 1984, p. 13). These feelings are quite realistic, also, as the family's assets must be divided differently and parents are not always considerate of the effects of their continued postdivorce conflict on even their young adult children.

Children of Divorce: A Study

Samples

Approximately two-thirds of our adult sample had children at the time of their divorce, to whom we also sent questionnaires. Form IIA, for children ten years old and younger, was answered by one of the child's parents. Form IIB was answered by the children of divorce over ten years of age. In order to investigate the effects of divorce on adolescents and young adults, this population was augmented by responses from students, (also children of divorce) at a suburban commuter campus of a large state university. As with the principal population, these college students came from varied religious and socio-economic backgrounds. Table 1 gives the demographic background of the two age groups on gender, age, and custody variables (preliminary findings). Separation of the parents, in several cases, occurred when a child was too young to exhibit or express clearly differentiated feelings, or when he/she could not remember years later what the feelings had been. As a result, four questionnaires from the older children's group and three from younger children could not be included in an analysis of post-separation and present feelings.

Insert Table 1 about here

Children's Feelings

Respondents were asked to indicate how true several "feelings" were at the time of separation and at the time of responding on a scale of 1 = Very True to 5 = Very Untrue. Where there was no response or the item was not applicable for some reason, the item was scored "6," which raised

the mean scores slightly when they occurred. A sample of these responses is included in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

In the case of the younger children ("Babes"), a parent responded, and may have unintentionally distorted perceptions or inaccurately recalled the child's feelings. As Young (1983) noted, parents' perceptions of children's adjustment is often "off." It is readily apparent from the figures above, however, that the younger children were, in general, less troubled than the older ones at the time of the separation/divorce. This reflects the same pattern as Coddington (1972) found. In several instances, the young child (as recalled by the responding parent) was probably unable to indicate, for example, "feelings of rejection" or "depression." The older children of divorce, in contrast, tend to show a wider range of responses and were more sensitive to their feelings at the time of separation as well as in the present.

The older children ("Older Kids") were much angrier initially than the younger ones, but there is somewhat less difference between the two groups at present. They were also markedly more depressed than the younger group at separation, but again, the gap between the two groups has narrowed in the present. Both groups have moved from "some confusion" to relatively little confusion in the interval between separation and the time of responding.

On the question of feelings of capability, the older subjects have moved from the negative toward the positive more than is true for the

younger children, whose parents tended to see them as "often" feeling capable at both points in time. The older children were much less happy than the younger ones at separation and now, which is not surprising since they were and are more capable of understanding what has happened to the family.

The "Total Change Score" summarizes the total shift in feelings in item-by-item scores. For example, if a subject indicated a "2" (often true) for feeling confused at the time of separation and a "4" (often untrue) for feeling confused now, the change score for that item equals +2. If a "5" (very untrue) was listed for happiness at the time of separation, and a "2" now, the change score would equal a +3. However, if the subject rated feelings of capability at "2" for the time of separation and "3" now, the change score equals -1. Since the older children were generally more variable in their self-ratings than the parents were in rating the younger children, it is logical that they also show a larger mean score for total change than do the younger children.

Adolescents and Young Adults

Comparing a subgroup of our adolescent subjects to those in the Australian study (McLoughlin & Whitfield, 1984), we found that some of our 13-17-year-olds reported being "very happy" at the time of separation, some were "very unhappy," and the others were neutral. Most of our subgroup saw little change in school performance at the time of separation, in contrast to the 50% of Australian subjects who saw improvement in their grades. This may reflect the shift in impact of the separation that Coddington (1972) found occurring between junior high and senior high students. Like the

Australian teen-agers, ours saw little change in peer relationships when their family status changed. A substantial difference is noted, however, in the use of non-familial support at the time of separation. More of the American subjects, proportionately, had consulted a school counselor or a psychotherapist for support than was true among the Australians. This may reflect different national orientations toward therapy or different socio-economic orientations.

Among both our adolescent and young adult subjects, it appears that there has been substantial maturation in the years since their parents parted. As other investigators have found, these adolescents and young adults have often had to assume more responsibilities earlier than they would have otherwise. Their negative feelings have softened and their relationships with others have generally improved. Almost all of these young adults now have a less romantic, more serious view of marriage than is usually found among their peers from intact families. Although they may still have some regrets at the family break-up, they take a realistic view of the situation and have few if any of the hopes for a parental reconciliation that much younger children of divorce have. Rather than dwelling in the past and regretting the loss of family activities, as the younger children tend to do, they are facing their own futures and planning ahead.

For individuals who are chronologically late adolescents or young adults, the absence of custody contests does not mean that there are also no loyalty dilemmas. One young man, aged 28, said, for example, "When my parents split a year ago, I thought it would have no effect on me. Was I ever wrong!" A young woman of 20 felt she had no roots after her parents'

separation. One parent was in Florida, the other was in New Jersey preparing to remarry, and she wandered between them during her vacations from college feeling as if her only "true" home was at her dormitory. Yet another example of the concerns of college student/young adult children of divorce is seen in the case of the young adult children of a woman, newly separated, who asked their mother two questions that exemplified their anxieties: 1) "Are you going to take back your maiden name?" and 2)"Are you going to sell our house?" If she responded "yes" to the first question, this would imply partial rejection of them since they shared the family name with the now absent father. The second question reflected their need, even though no longer residents of the family home, for stability in this period of change.

For some college students, of course, the separation may come as a relief from parental bickering, or worse, in earlier years. One of our 19-year-old subjects, whose parents had separated just after her high school graduation, commented that for her "It was one of the worst and best things that ever happened in my family life. Thank God, it's over. No more 'real' fighting . . . just inner jealousies and such." Another female subject, also aged 18 at the time of the separation, wrote: "I felt from the start that my parents' separation/divorce was a good thing--a lot of tension left the house with my dad. I wish for my mom's sake that they could have worked it out, but my dad couldn't (and can't) handle closeness. It's been difficult seeing mom upset, (same for my dad), but I've gotten to know both of them better because of their situation."

Support networks for the older children of divorce were strongest with friends and siblings, although if the mother was supportive at separation

there was strong probability that the father was also ($r = .611$, $p < .001$). Maternal and paternal relatives were generally reported to be supportive at separation if they lived close enough, but for both older and younger children of divorce grandparents and other relatives often lived at a distance. For the younger children, paternal grandparents were less likely to be of assistance than maternal grandparents, but this appears to be related to the fact that most of the younger children were in the custody of their mothers (even where there was nominal joint custody). Only six of the older children reported having had support from a school counselor, four from a psychotherapist, and one from group therapy. This is reflected in the negative correlations between therapeutic support and classroom behavior and relationships with relatives and friends, all at statistically significant levels.

In an effort to determine whether the parents' views of their life now and their children's feelings now as contrasted with the time of separation had a meaningful relationship, parental responses to questions about their "Life Now" ($N = 23$), and their children's "Total Change Scores" ($N = 36$) were compared. As shown in Table 3, the children's scores had consistently low negative, non-significant, correlations with parental evaluations of their own "Emotional Life Now," "Financial Life Now," "Occupational/vocational Life Now," "Physical Health Now," "Social Life Now," and "Total Quality of Life Now."

Insert Table 3 about here

Discussion

Among the difficulties in research reports on divorce are the use of different time spans (at separation, pre-divorce, immediately post-divorce, variable periods post-divorce); non-representative, small, biased samples; clinical vs. non-clinical samples; psychometrically unsound measures of adjustment; lack of control groups; the use of "captive audiences;" the number of divorces experienced; self-selection of volunteer participants; parents responding for themselves and their children; lack of adequate attention to age and gender differences; and relationships between children of divorce and their parents, siblings, other relatives, and friends (Ellison, 1983; Emery, 1982; Kalter & Rembar, 1981; Kurdek, 1983; Kurdek, Blisk, & Siesky, 1981; Levitin, 1979; White & Mika, 1983). In addition, most of the studies of children of divorce have been focused on pre-school and latency-age children.

In the study at hand, there has been an attempt to deal with some of these research problems. The sample of divorced adults from which most of the children's sample was drawn came from 17 states, mostly from Pennsylvania and Florida. They represented a wide range of socioeconomic levels, although the majority had had some college education and were middle- or upper-middle-class. All subjects were volunteers who responded to a mail survey, with parents responding for children ten years of age or younger. All of the adults had been separated or divorced from their first marriage, reducing the problems attendant upon multiple parentage for the children. Additional college-age subjects were obtained from a student population in an effort to derive a broader picture of the effects of divorce on this age group.

All subjects were asked to compare their relationships with others and their school performance at the time of separation, their support networks at that time, and their feelings at the time of separation and the time of responding. Ten of the twelve children aged ten and under were in the custody of their mothers; 20 of the 30 children aged eleven or more were in the mother's custody. Only five of the younger children and nine of the older group had been consulted on custody and choice of residence.

For the younger group, parents reported the dominant feeling at separation to have been capability, followed by happiness and feelings of confusion. According to the parents, there was little depression or anger or feeling of rejection at the time of separation. There were slight improvements in feelings over time, with total change scores ranging from -7 to +30 but a mean change score of only 8.56. These data support the general picture of very young children being minimally troubled by the separation and slightly older ones having more difficulty, but must be interpreted in the light of parental response rather than subject response.

Among our adolescent subjects, reactions to the separation ranged along the continuum from "very unhappy" to "very happy." They found support from counselors or psychotherapists, siblings, and friends more than from grandparents or other relatives. This is partly due to the geographic mobility of families, with relatives often living hundreds of miles apart. Most of the adolescents saw little change in their school performance at the time of separation, although several indicated improvement since then. They expressed a recognition that parental reconciliation was unlikely, which is consistent with other reports of adolescents' orientation toward

reality. At the time of responding, they tended to be somewhat more concerned with getting on with their lives than with recalling and regretting the loss of happier family life. These adolescents, and the young adult children of divorce, appear to have matured since the original separation and to have a more serious view of marriage than their peers in intact marriages (as reported in the literature). They reacted more strongly to the separation than the younger children are reported to have done, with feelings of capability, confusion, and anger most intense. They also tended to be more depressed than not, and more unhappy than happy, in contrast to the younger children. Total change scores for the older children of divorce ranged from -5 to +30, with a mean of 15.462, reflecting greater shifts than were reported for the younger children.

Across the total age range of children of divorce, there was a low positive, non-significant relationship between children's change scores and their parents' view of their quality of life now. This does not support the finding generally reported in the literature that children reflect the custodial parent's adjustment to separation and divorce, but may be a function of the wider age span included in this study. Feelings of children of divorce by gender also do not appear as consistent as is shown in the literature and may similarly reflect the broad age range. Of the 36 children of divorce for whom total change scores could be ascertained, only four (11.1%) have negative scores. All of the others indicated emotional changes over time that were positive. Further study of these findings is clearly warranted.

Conclusion

This descriptive study of children of divorce dealt with subjects whose parents separated when the children were still unborn to age 32. Reports by parents for the younger children indicated reactions to the separation consistent with findings of many other studies. Self-reports by older children showed a wider variation of reactions to the same life crisis, but also greater positive changes in feelings over time. Among the adolescent and college-age children of divorce, comments about the family break-up were mixed, with some subjects finding the divorce a relief after prolonged parental conflict. The wide age range of the subjects appears to account for lack of support for the often-cited finding that children's adjustment is closely related to parental adjustment or that there are gender differences in children's reactions to divorce.

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Table 1. Gender, Age at Separation, Age Now, Custodial Parent, and Consultation on Custody for two groups of Children of Divorce

	10 years and under	11 years and older
N =	12	30
Gender		
Male	5	16
Female	7	14
Age at parental separation		
Mean	4.50	14.63
Median	4.00	16.40
Range	P*- 9.00	1-34.00
Age now		
Mean	6.58	21.47
Median	7.00	20.50
Range	1-10.00	11-40.00
Custodial parent		
Father	2	3
Mother	10	20
Not applicable/no response	0	7
Consulted on custody/residence		
Yes	5	9
No	7	18
Not applicable/no response	0	3

P*--Separation occurred during pregnancy

Table 2. Comparison of Strength of Feelings of Older and Younger Children of Divorce

	"Babes"		"Older Kids"	
N =	9		26	
Mean age at separation	4.22		16.69	
Mean age now	6.89		22.15	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
ANGER				
At separation	3.56	2-5	2.65	1-5
Now	3.67	3-4	3.19	1-5
FEELING CAPABLE				
At separation	2.00	1-3	2.50	1-6*
Now	2.11	1-6*	1.88	1-6*
DEPRESSION				
At separation	4.11	2-5	2.73	1-5
Now	4.11	3-5	3.77	1-5
HAPPY				
At separation	2.56	1-5	3.46	1-5
Now	1.78	1-2	2.42	1-6*
FEELING CONFUSED				
At separation	2.89	1-4	2.61	1-5
Now	3.78	3-6*	3.65	1-5
FEELING REJECTED				
At separation	3.67	3-5	3.38	1-5
Now	4.11	3-6*	3.69	1-5
TOTAL CHANGE SCORES	8.56	-7-+30	15.46	-5-+30

*6 = Answer omitted

Table 3. Correlation of Parents' Quality of Life Now Scores and Children's Total Change Scores (N = 36)

Parents' Scores	Children's Scores
Emotional life now	-.114
Financial life now	-.072
Occupational/vocational life now	-.169
Physical health now	-.179
Social life now	-.135
Total quality of life now	-.171